



## INTERPERSONAL RELATION: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HYPERCOMPETITIVENESS AND BIRTH ORDER AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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### ABSTRACT

*Over the years there has been a growing interest in human relationships' and the problem of human relationships. Humans are inherently equipped with social instinct that allows them to follow and maintain relationship. This research was conducted to investigate the influence of hypercompetitiveness and birth order on interpersonal relation. Hypotheses were generated from Karen Horney and Alfred Adler s' theories about hypercompetitiveness and birth order respectively. Birth order was defined in terms of three groups only: first, middle and last born. Participants (N= 300) with mean age of 25.86 (SD 5.63) for male and 25.56 (5.52) for female were students from Yaba College of Technology and University of Lagos. The instruments used were Hypercompetitive attitude scale by Ryckman, Hammer, Kaczor & Gold (1990) with 26 items and Index of peer relation by Hudson, Nuris, Daley & Newsome, (1986) with 25 items. A cross sectional survey was used in collecting data using accidental sampling techniques. Hypercompetitiveness has a significant negative correlation with interpersonal relation ( $r=-0.215^*$ , at  $p, <0.05$ ). Middle born were not more hypercompetitive than participants in other birth positions but had poor interpersonal relation. Explanations were proffered for the findings based on theoretical and empirical literature. The study recommends that parents as the main provider of interpersonal relationship; therefore they should realize the importance of equal parental investment among their children and ensure, good parent-child relationship and proper coercive management practices while avoiding any form of preferential treatment. These will assist the young ones in building good social relationship.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest in human relationship and the problem of human relationships. Individuals are inherently equipped with social instinct that allows them to follow and maintain relationship (Reeve, 1998). Relationship is one of the bedrock of all human interaction. A popular proverb that "no man is an Island" shows the importance of interpersonal relation. Sometimes our attitude, behavior and challenges of life can affect the way we relate to one another and compete with one another. The extreme side of competitiveness is, termed "hypercompetitiveness" (Horney 1937). The fact that all individuals like to compete and win at all cost or see most events in his life as competition, can be termed hypercompetitive attitude. The attitude can lead people to experience difficulty in relating with others or lead the person to an unstable and unhealthy interpersonal relation. Siblings that are born into the same family end up having different personality and relational styles as a result of differences in birth order ( Adler 1927).

Interpersonal relationship involves an interconnected network in which people share themselves and trust the value of mutual understanding and benefit. According to Kiesler



(1996), "people seek interaction from others to fulfill their basic interpersonal needs; these needs are the need for control (power and dominance) and the need for affiliation (love and friendliness)". Interpersonal relationships are dynamic in nature, these relationships fluctuate in perceived quality; individuals feel more and less close to, committed to and satisfied with their significant others (Fitzsimons, 2010).

Several factors have been identified to affect our interpersonal relation according to Karen Horney's view and predict how close or away we move towards our significant others. Several studies have examined different factors that affect the growing or weakening of relationships (Ries, 2000 ;Hardie, 2010 ; Bowe, 2010) but fewer psychological research have been conducted to determine internal factors that influence the way we interact with others.

This study examined how two of such factors birth order and hypercompetitiveness, influences peoples' interpersonal relation. Alfred Adler (1927) was the first person to initiate an interest in people's birth order and its significant impact on personality and relationship within the family. It has been theorized that each birth order carries with it, its own "unique" set of characteristics or personality traits. Firstborns are often believed to be directive, goal-oriented, conservative, organized, responsible and more conforming (Adler, 1927; Gfroerer, Gfroerer, Curlette, White & Kern, 2003; Stewart, 2004). Middle-borns often feel out of place, they may strive for fairness in their struggle to stay ahead or meet up with the older siblings, avoid conflict, feel insecure which in turn will affect their relationship throughout their whole life. (Adler, 1927; Stewart, 2004; Falbo, 1999). The youngest children are often viewed as spoiled or babied, often "pampered" leading to dependence and selfishness, free-spirited, endearing and social. (Adler, 1927; Sulloway, 1996; Gfroerer et al 2003, Stewart, 2004). The experience attached to birth order position, and its associated personality traits may have an impact on the way an individual behaves and thinks in the course of interaction with others. "Unique family experiences and perspectives such as birth order have been theorized to shape people's personalities and foster certain traits more than others". (McGurick, Pettijohn & Terry, 2008). Even though children have the same parents and are raised in nearly the same family settings, differences in birth order position may result in perspectives on life and relationships being quite different between siblings. (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1992; McGurick et al., 2008). Leman (2009) pointed out that as one begins to understand birth order and the way it influences him or her, one can improve one's relationship in every area of life.

Another variable that could be said to be an influence or predictor for interpersonal relationship is hypercompetitiveness. One person's win can be another person's loss, and the drive to be better than others, when taken too far, can appear ruthless and selfish. Trait of competitiveness may have emotional and social consequences and competitiveness may also be related to the interpersonal traits of empathy and aggression (Kayan, 2003). "Competition to win presumably requires at least a temporary suppression of empathetic concern for opponents' feelings and outcomes" (Buhrmester & Hibbard, 2010). Although many cultures eulogize and respect competitive people, sometimes their competitive drive to win can trample on other people's feelings. Sullivan (1953) argued that competition can attenuate intimacy and close relationship. "Competitiveness and the hostility that accompanies it, pervades all human relationship" (Horney, 1937). Hypercompetitiveness; an indiscriminate need to compete and succeed at any cost is a neurotic means of maintaining or enhancing one's self-worth (Horney, 1937). It also includes feelings and thoughts of manipulation, aggressiveness, hostility, exploitation and disparagement of others across diverse situations. Hypercompetitive individuals seek self-aggrandizement through indiscriminate competition, even in situations where competition was uncalled for such as their interpersonal relationships.



They perceive relationship as a kind of competition and try to subdue and humiliate their peers in their self-defeating quest for superiority.

Some studies have shown that children develop their interactional style and social behaviour by relating to their parents and siblings (Salmon,1998 ; Zajnoc & Sulloway,2007 ;Liam & Martin, 2011). People's experience in the family environment can affect their judgment and relationships. Birth order and hypercompetitiveness have intertwined to direct this unique family experience. Accessing the word "de identification" for birth order position with regards to relationship with parents, firstborns and last-borns are more likely to acquiesce to, identify with and adopt parental norm than middle-borns (Salmon, 1998). Adler (1927) believed that middle borns often have the sense of not belonging and often fight to receive attention from parents and care givers; they feel that they are being ignored or dubbed off as being the same as another sibling. Being in the middle, a child can feel insecure or neglected; this in turn can affect their relationships. Pollet & Nettle (2009) conducted a study to investigate how birth order affects relationship with siblings and friends. Their findings show Firstborns were more likely to report good relationship with their siblings compared to middle-borns and last-borns. On the other hand middle-borns were less likely to report good relationship with their friends than last-borns and firstborns. "Middle siblings, who have difficulty finding their place within their family and may feel squeezed in between their siblings, have a more difficult time developing feelings of belonging or social interest" (Sulloway,2007).

### **Aims and Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to;

- (i) Determine if there is a relationship between hypercompetitiveness and interpersonal relation.
- (ii) Investigate if middle born participants are more hypercompetitive than first-borns and last-born participants
- (iii) Examine if middle born participants have poorer interpersonal relation than first-borns and last-born participants.

The following hypotheses were tested in this study

- (i) There is a significant negative relationship between hypercompetitiveness and interpersonal relation.
- (ii) Middle-born participants are more hypercompetitive than first-borns and lastborn participants.
- (iii) Middle-born participants have poorer interpersonal relation than first-borns and last-born participants.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

Cross sectional survey design was used in this study. This is because the research was carried out in two institutions and data was collected through the use of questionnaires. The independent variables are birth order and hypercompetitiveness and the dependent variable is interpersonal relation. This research was carried out at Yaba College of Technology and University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos state respectively.

#### **Study Population**

The participants were young adults aged 19-35 years from two institutions, (Yaba College of Technology and University of Lagos) in Lagos. A total of (N=300) three hundred students, consisting of 148 (49.3%) males and 152 females (50.7%) participated in the study. One hundred and eighty-six participants 62% (86 males and 100 females) were from Yaba College of Technology and one hundred and fourteen



participants 38% (62 males and 52 females) participated in the study from University of Lagos.

### **Sampling and Sampling Method**

Sampling was random and stratified by faculties in the institution. The sample represented about 2% of Yaba College of technology students and about 1% of University of Lagos students.

### **Research Instruments**

All variables investigated in this study were assessed; using two instruments; Hypercompetitive attitude scale (Ryckman, Hammer, Kaczor & Gold 1990) and the Index of peer relation (IRP) (Hudson, Nuris, Daley & Newsome, 1986). The instrument consist of three sections. The first section; (section A) a questionnaire consist of the participant's demographic variables including sex , name of institution ,the birth position and the second (section B) and third section (section C) were the Index of peer relation and Hypercompetitive attitude scale respectively.

### **Hypercompetitive Attitude Scale**

This is a 26-item measure used for assessing individual differences in hypercompetitive attitude orientation, developed by Ryckman et al.,1990. Items were responded to on a 5-point Likert format as follows: (1) never true of me to, seldom true of me (2), sometimes true of me (3), often true of me (4), (5) always true of me. Sample items are "I compete with others even when they are not competing with me" and "In school, I feel superior whenever I do better on tests than other students". Items with reverse scoring are 26, 25, 24, 20, 19, 18, 16, 15, 13, 10, 6, 5, 3. While the remaining items were scored directly. Scores could range from 26 to 130 with a higher score indicating greater hypercompetitive orientation (Cronbach's alpha = .85). The researcher conducted a pilot study with 50 undergraduates and obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .61.

### **Index of Peer Relation (IRP).**

The index of peer relation is a 25-item inventory designed to assess the gravity and expanse of the problems of interpersonal relationship an individual is encountering in the course of social interaction with his or her peers. The index of peer relation (IPR) was developed by Hudson, et al.(1986). It consists of 25 –items which the participants responded to on a 5-point scale. The score range of IPR is 25 to 125, and 30 is the cut off score. The instrument has direct and reverses scoring; reverse scoring is assigned to items nos. 1, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, and 22 while the rest are direct scoring. High scores on IPR indicate severe problems of peer relations, whereas, low scores indicate mild problems. The result of the direct scores and the reverse scores are added to obtain a total score, the score is subtracted from 25. Sample items are "I get along very well with my peers" and "My peers do not really interest me". The IPR scale has been investigated with respect to content, construct, factorial and known group validity, nearly always achieving validity co-efficient of .70 and greater.

### **Procedure**

The research was carried out in two institutions; the University of Lagos and the second is Yaba College of Technology. For the two institutions, in each of the sampled area, the researcher met the participants at various relaxation centers and introduced herself before explaining the aims and purposes of the research. The researcher further assured the participants of their confidentiality. The participants were encouraged to ask questions in case of any uncertainty of meaning in the course of completion of the test instrument. All collected questionnaires were cross-checked, for any item that was not



responded to, when the participants completed the questionnaires. It took each participants approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. A total of 320 questionnaires were administered for this study; however 20 questionnaires were discarded after collection because they were only-born.

The data that was collected from all properly completed questionnaires was entered into SPSS version 20, Pearson moment correlation was used to test the first hypothesis, Independent t-test was used to test for gender difference in hypercompetitiveness and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test the second and third hypotheses. All stated hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive statistics used for this study are the means and standard deviation.

## RESULTS

The data collected was analysed and the results were presented below.

### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1: Means and Standard Deviation of participants' scores on the variables**

| Variables               | Male      |     |       | Female    |     |       |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----|-------|-----------|-----|-------|
|                         | $\bar{X}$ | N   | SD    | $\bar{X}$ | N   | SD    |
| Hypercompetitiveness    | 76.86     | 148 | 12.02 | 77.63     | 152 | 10.89 |
| Interpersonal relations | 65.33     | 148 | 10.23 | 66.46     | 152 | 10.48 |

Table 1 above, shows the mean and standard deviation of hypercompetitiveness and interpersonal based on gender. By comparing the mean scores of male and female respondents respectively, male (M=76.9; SD=12.0) reported a higher score on competitiveness compared to female (M=77.63; SD=10.9). Male however (M=65.33; SD=10.2) reported lower score on interpersonal relations compared to female (M=67.6; SD=10.5).

**Hypothesis1:** There is a significant negative relationship between hypercompetitiveness and interpersonal relation.

**Table 2 : Correlation between hypercompetitiveness and interpersonal relation.**

| Variables              | $\bar{X}$ | SD    | R       | P     |
|------------------------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|
| Hypercompetitiveness   | 77.25     | 11.45 | -0.215* | P<.05 |
| Interpersonal relation | 66.46     | 10.40 |         |       |

In the above table, hypercompetitiveness showed a significant negative correlation with interpersonal relations. Results above shows  $r =$  value of  $-0.215^*$  at  $p < .05$ . This indicates that hypercompetitiveness has a significant negative relationship with interpersonal relation. The first hypothesis is hereby accepted.

### Hypothesis Two

Middle-born participants are more hypercompetitive than first-borns and lastborn participants.

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics of birth order on hypercompetitiveness**

| Variables   | N   | Mean  | SD    |
|-------------|-----|-------|-------|
| first born  | 78  | 77.46 | 9.89  |
| Middle born | 117 | 76.53 | 13.17 |
| last born   | 105 | 77.88 | 10.48 |
| Total       | 300 | 77.25 | 11.45 |

The result presented in table 3 indicated that the mean on hypercompetitiveness score for first- born respondents ( $M= 77.4$   $SD=9.9$ ), middle- born participants had a mean score of ( $M= 76.6$ ,  $SD= 13.2$ ) and last born participants had a mean score of ( $M=77.9$ ,  $SD=13.7$ ). This means that middle-born participants had a similar score on hypercompetitiveness compared to first- born and last- born participants.

**Table : 4 ANOVA summary table of effect of birth order on hypercompetitiveness.**

|             | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F    | P     |
|-------------|----------------|-----|-------------|------|-------|
| Birth order | 105.16         | 2   | 52.58       | 0.39 | >0.05 |
| Error       | 39107.09       | 297 | 131.67      |      |       |
| Total       | 1829481.25     | 300 |             |      |       |

$P>.05, df (2,297), f_{crit}(2.60)= 0.399$

ANOVA results showed that birth order had no significant influence on hypercompetitiveness ( $F(2,297)= 1.27$ ,  $p >.05$ ). First-born participants had a mean score of ( $M=77.46$ ,  $SD=9.89$ ), middle-born participants had a mean score of ( $M=76.53$ ,  $SD=13.17$ ), while last-born participants had a mean score of ( $M=77.88$ ,  $SD=13.73$ ). Thus, hypothesis two which states that Middle-borns will be more hypercompetitive than first-borns and last-borns was rejected.

### Hypothesis Three

Middle-born participants have poorer interpersonal relation than first-borns and last-born participants.

**Table :5 Descriptive statistics of birth order on interpersonal relations**

| Variables   | N   | Mean  | S. D  |
|-------------|-----|-------|-------|
| first born  | 78  | 68.57 | 7.73  |
| Middle born | 117 | 64.43 | 11.87 |
| last born   | 105 | 67.14 | 10.06 |
| Total       | 300 | 66.46 | 10.40 |

The result presented in table 5 indicated that the mean on inter personal relation score for first- born respondents ( $M= 68.6$ :  $SD=7.7$ ), middle- born respondents had a mean score of ( $M= 64.4$ ,  $SD= 11.9$ ) and last-borns had a mean score of ( $M=67.1$ ,  $SD=10.0$ ). This shows that middle-borns exhibited poorer interpersonal relation compared to first-born and last-born respondents.

**Table 6:ANOVA summary table of effect of birth order on interpersonal relation.**

|             | Sum of Squares | Df  | Mean Square | F     | P     |
|-------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------|
| Birth order | 877.85         | 2   | 438.92      | 4.139 | <0.05 |
| Error       | 31494.66       | 297 | 106.04      |       |       |
| Total       | 1357452.00     | 300 |             |       |       |

$P < .05$ ,  $df (2,297)$ ,  $f_{crit}(2.60) = 4.139$

ANOVA results showed that birth order had a significant influence on interpersonal relationship [ $F(2,297) = 4.139$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ]. First-born participants had a mean score of ( $M = 68.6$   $SD = 7.7$ ), middle-born participants had a mean score of ( $M = 64.43$ ,  $SD = 11.9$ ), while last-born participants had a mean score of ( $M = 67.14$ ,  $SD = 10.0$ ).

Thus, hypothesis three which states that middle-born will have poorer interpersonal relation than first-borns than last-born was accepted.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of birth order and hypercompetitiveness interpersonal relation. In the course of this study three hypotheses were formulated and tested. The first hypothesis states there is a significant negative relationship between hypercompetitiveness and interpersonal relation after the analysis it was accepted. This implies that the more hypercompetitive an individual is the poorer the interpersonal relation. This finding is in support of the study on hypercompetitive in academia by Bing (1999). He found that the intense competitive striving of hypercompetitive was negatively related to unhealthy relationship. He noted that hypercompetitive individuals reported feeling hostile towards their fellow students, were anxious, stressed and socially isolated. They also reported that they lied, cheated, and manipulated others to attain goals generally.

The finding is also in agreement with the study by Ryckman et al (2011) on hypercompetitiveness and relationships. They found that hypercompetitive person's had greater degree and severity of problematic relationships with both family and peers. In the study it was evident that the more hypercompetitive a person is, the less his or her relationship closeness was with both friends and family; although the correlation was not of significant magnitude. They reported that hypercompetitive individuals have stronger needs to control their partners, greater mistrust and jealousy, provided little emotional support to their partners and had more disagreement and conflict with them. Similarly, Scneider, Woodburn, del Pilar Soters del Toro & Udavari (2005) found that hypercompetitiveness within friendship was associated with conflict, less closeness, and relationship dissolution. The results from this study indicated that hypercompetitive individuals have problematic relationships. Specifically, hypercompetitive people expressed greater discontent with, greater indifference and greater problems in, relationships involving their peers. Hypercompetitive individuals generally saw nothing wrong with turning every situation into competition and self-interest gain at the expense of others. Horney proposed that hypercompetitiveness were maladaptive and if not checked could lead to neurosis, the results from this study strongly support her interpretation. Also many research have demonstrated that hypercompetitiveness is associated with a range of negative personality correlates as well as having negative implications for different interpersonal relationships. (Ryckman et al., 2002, & Bing, 1999).

The second hypothesis stated that Middle-born participants are more hypercompetitive than first-borns and lastborn participants. According to Horney, hypercompetitiveness is a consequence of disturbed parent-child relationships in early childhood wherein parents



tend to deride, humiliate or act indifferent towards the child while Adler believed that middle born children do not receive attention from their parents and “they feel many times they are being ignored or dubbed off as being the same as another sibling” (Adler,1927). The findings from this study revealed that middle-borns were not more hypercompetitive than the first and last-borns. The result from this study has many implications with regards to the root of hypercompetitiveness. One it implies that the root of hypercompetitiveness may not be only from parental handling according to Horney’s theory; it could be from other causes such as sibling rivalry or rejection and abandonment during early childhood. Sibling rivalry can be said to be antagonism between siblings for parental investments. Sulloway (2007) believed that this rivalry between siblings is a kind of specialized adaptation mechanism; where siblings strive to carve out their own niches in the family. Mc Nerry & Usner (2001) in their study found out that 65% of their participants reported that they saw the relationship with their siblings as competition. This struggle or competition between siblings for parental love and approval if not addressed by the parents, can promote hypercompetitiveness, whereby this constant sibling competition spill over to become extreme that is going beyond the family. Sulloway (1999) reported sibling competition causes a formative frame work that continues to reflect throughout one’s life. If sibling competition and conflict are not processed well, unresolved anger, unnecessary competitiveness and shame may surface in adulthood and lead to psychological problems (Volling & Belsky, 2002).

It is also important to note that this study did not totally rule out Horney’s believes concerning parental harsh disciplinary practices as the root of hypercompetitiveness, rather it explored other factors that could cause an individual to be hypercompetitive. “Social psychologists believe that the order in which a person was born not only influences their personality but how they view relationship with other people” (Salmon, 2003). This implies that, the way a child will be treated depends on their birth position and the way each person is treated shapes the type of relationship the person will have later on with significant others. Furthermore family relationship which is the first type of relationship an individual experiences, has more to do with how a person perceives or views relationship with others.

The third hypothesis explored if middle born participants would have poorer interpersonal relationship than first-borns and last-born participants .The findings from this study showed that middle-borns had poorer interpersonal relationship when compared to first-borns and last-borns. Could this be a reflection of middle-borns receiving less attention from the family? Family relationship and interaction can hinder or enhance the development of a child’s social competence. Infants or children whose parents are inconsistent and insensitive to their needs may learn both to model and generalize their parents’ insensitivity and inconsistency to other relationships. According to Adler’s birth order theory concerning middle born children, middle born children do not receive attention from their parents and they do not have good parent-child relationship with their parents. The result from this study supports Adler’s theory. The findings from this study could be explained using object relational theory by Heinz Kohut (1971). This theory focuses on the importance of parent-child relationship. Object relational theory suggests that relationship with significant others from the past primarily in the family can affect a person in the present. Thus poor interpersonal relation of middle born children is a reflection of their past disturbed parent-child relationship. Pollet and Nettle (2009) study on how birth order affects relationship with family members and friends showed that middle-borns are more likely to report worse family relationships when compared to other birth orders. They reported that middle-borns isolated themselves based on the perception that they are at less of an advantage than their older and younger siblings



and this can affect their relationship within the family dynamics. They called this effect the “negated middle born effect”. McGurick & Pettijohn (2008) study, predicted that middle born children will have high jealousy rating than other birth position on the assumption that people experience different family environments and develop certain traits related to their birth order position. They found that middle born children were most jealous than those in other birth positions.

However, Salmon & Dalsy’s (2003) investigation on the impact of birth order on attitudes towards friends, family and mating does not support the findings from this study. Their findings showed that middle-borns expressed more positive views in terms of attitudes towards friends and that they showed stronger “non-kin ties” than other birth positions. The present study is not in line with the findings from this study, the researcher’s explanations for this close formation of “non-kin ties” points towards the opposite direction. She reported that middle-borns formed these ties because they received a lesser degree of support from their families and they feel less close to them therefore they turn to reciprocal alliance outside the family. The findings of this study supports the fact showed that middle borns people have poorer relationship with both parents and peers. Also Lemman (2009) reported the same findings as Salmon (2003). According to Lemman, middle born children find their parents to be less supportive of them and having their parents be less supportive of them causes the middle born child to feel distant from their parents. They are less likely to be influenced by family solidarity therefore they tend to turn towards their peer group over their families.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study revealed a significant negative relationship between hypercompetitiveness and interpersonal relation. Middle borns were found to have poor interpersonal relation but were not more hypercompetitive than person’s in other birth positions.

The findings from this study throw more light into the influence of hypercompetitiveness on the social functioning of people. It also points to the fact that the root of hypercompetitiveness might not only be from the family social environment according to Horney’s theory. Also this study portrays the importance of equal parental investment and family relationship during early childhood and its life-long effect.

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